

Utah's Connecting to Collections Project: A Statewide Preservation Initiative

Applicant: University of Utah

Need and rationale

Utah's rich cultural heritage is housed in the publicly accessible collections of its 265 Museums, 55 city/county libraries, 21 college and university libraries, 29 county record offices, and 93 archives. Geographic distances between Utah's 463 collecting institutions are vast, and Utah's few preservation professionals are isolated. All ten Utah residents maintaining membership in the American Institute for Conservation reside within a 50 mile radius of the capital, Salt Lake City, while the collecting institutions can be 300 miles apart. As noted in the Heritage Health Index (HHI), these broadly dispersed institutions are responsible for the stewardship of the State's irreplaceable material legacy but resources and technical expertise are scarce, especially among smaller institutions.

As with all states, the region is potentially susceptible to a wide range of disasters including earthquakes, mudslides, floods, and fires, and several of Utah's collecting institutions have suffered significant losses due to natural or manmade disasters. While most of the state's museums, libraries, archives, and historical societies contain rare and irreplaceable holdings, few employ professionally trained staff to care for them. Funding is among the lowest in the country and training opportunities are scarce.

At present there is no consistent source of preservation assistance for most institutions statewide, and previously no formal statewide preservation survey has been undertaken. Awareness of the problem is keen and has contributed to incremental steps being taken over time. These include passage of a statewide alkaline paper law (1988), annual preservation education workshops (1988-2000), and three regional disaster preparedness courses (2007-2008) offered through the aegis of the Western States and Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS). Additionally, the Utah Office of Museum Services provides a limited number of consultations and workshops related to collection management. However, it is relatively common to hear, for example, that due to insufficient funding, the curator at a university art museum is unable to purchase sheets of alkaline board to separate framed paintings in storage.

To address these widespread challenges, seven leaders from the state's largest and most influential cultural agencies (Utah State Archives, Utah State Library, Utah State History, Utah Office of Museum Services, Utah Academic Library Consortium, LDS Church History Department, and the University of Utah's Marriott Library) formed a partnership in November, 2007 for the purpose of implementing the recommendations of the HHI. These seven partners represent the multiple perspectives of the State's collecting institutions and form UC2C's Project Task Force. Individually, the Project Task Force members are able to coordinate with their individual agencies to effectively conduct a statewide preservation assessment. Collectively, they are then positioned to seek support from key public and private officials to address the deep rooted, endemic problems undermining appropriate collections care, especially within the State's smaller institutions.

The Planning Process

Although only 30 Utah collecting institutions participated in the HHI, Utah's Connecting to Collections project accepts the findings outlined in that report as

representative of conditions commonly found throughout the State. Accordingly, the goal of UC2C is to address HHI's four major recommendations:

- To help institutions recommit to providing safe conditions for the collections they hold in trust;
- To help institutions develop an emergency plan to protect collections;
- To help institutions assign responsibility for caring for collections to staff; and
- To help individuals at all levels of government and in the private sector assume responsibility for providing the support to allow these collections to survive.

In addition to safeguarding Utah's material heritage, UC2C sees an imperative to encompass digital collections of permanent value within the scope of its undertaking, as long-term solutions to digital preservation problems may be more affordable through cooperative action.

Coming in the second year of IMLS's Statewide Planning Grants, UC2C has benefited from observing the lessons learned from the first 19 recipients. Accordingly, UC2C has four objectives:

A. Hire a consultant to develop a preservation assessment tool, oversee its implementation, analyze the survey's results, and set priorities.

Preservation Consultant Tom Clareson (Program Director for New Initiatives, PALINET), was involved in five of the 19 projects previously supported by IMLS Statewide Planning Grants. Mr. Clareson has agreed to help Utah craft a plan of action that takes advantage of existing designs and brings to the project his experience with strategies that have proved effective. Working closely with Project Task Force, Mr. Clareson will develop a survey instrument that relies on existing models to help minimize the cost for this work. The resultant Statewide Preservation Survey instrument will be reviewed and revised by the Project Task Force to ensure it meets Utah's needs and that the language is clear and unambiguous to responders, many of whom have little or no preservation background.

B. Implement the survey.

Relying on the established cultural email networks (Utah State Library; Utah State Archives; and Office of Museum Services), the importance of the Statewide Preservation Survey and instructions for its completion will be distributed to all Utah collecting institutions by the Project Task Force. For smaller institutions lacking email (many of which hold amazing collections) surface mail and phone calls will be used. These instructions will be repeated as the surveys are distributed, and reminders will be sent weekly for three consecutive weeks to encourage a high rate of return. Institutions that do not return completed surveys timely will be contacted individually by telephone one month after the survey's initial distribution and offered help and encouragement to ease frustrations in completing the instrument.

C. Data analysis.

Preservation Consultant Tom Clareson and the Project Task Force will review the data extracted from the Statewide Preservation Survey, define short- and long-term priorities based on findings from other Statewide Planning Grants, and meet with the Project Task Force to discuss realistic steps for beginning the implementation of these

recommendations. The emphasis in UC2C will be on producing tangible, deliverable short-term outcomes to help develop immediate buy-in from the State's collecting institutions. In turn, the demonstrated preservation improvements occurring in cultural collections around the State will serve as a catalyst for developing long-term, sustainable support from the State's public and private funding sources.

D. Disseminate UC2C survey results.

Results from the UC2C Statewide Preservation Survey will be disseminated in four half-day Preservation Forums to which all of Utah's heritage professionals will be invited. The Preservation Forums will be held in strategic geographic locations throughout the State (Utah State Library, Salt Lake City; Utah State University Library, Logan; Southern Utah University, Cedar City; and Edge of the Cedars Museum, Blanding) and will be repeatedly publicized using the State's established cultural email networks and telephone solicitations. In addition to Tom Claeson, the 10-member Project Task Force, and representatives from Utah's cultural institutions (archives, museums, libraries, historical societies, and public record offices), members of Utah's State Legislature, key religious leaders, and tribal representatives will be invited to attend each Preservation Forum to begin developing support for the long-term implementation phase to come. The Preservation Forums will be held off-cycle from the State Legislature's annual winter meeting, and will avoid religious or tribal holidays to ensure maximum attendance. Discussions at the Preservation Forums will address the four recommendations identified in the HHI, the outcomes of the UC2C survey, and strategies for implementing the short- and long-term priorities identified by the Preservation Consultant and the Project Task Force. Small group discussions and open feedback sessions at each Preservation Forum will help ensure attendees are clear about the positive improvements they can implement immediately and the long-term benefits these changes will bring to their collections. The discussions will also seek ways for the State's cultural heritage professionals to engage public and private officials to help marshal support to begin addressing the State's most critical, long-term needs.

Strategic opportunities will be used to help implement both short- and long-term priorities identified through the Statewide Preservation Survey. For example, the Utah State Archives is currently participating in the Council of State Archivists (CoSA) Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) project supported by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The focus of this project is to develop curriculum and training through Web- and CD-based mediums. By 2010, Utah State Archives will provide training to assist all state and local governmental entities conduct continuity of operations planning and response, with special emphasis on the recovery of essential government records. This training (to be held in strategic centralized locations around the State) will continue the work initiated by WESTPAS in 2007. WESTPAS itself is currently seeking support from NEH to extend its disaster planning workshops in Western states and territories, which, if funded, will once again include Utah institutions. Coordinating these and similar initiatives will help increase the number of cultural institutions within the State exposed to the disaster planning process and other preservation initiatives. Heightened awareness resulting from the Statewide Preservation Survey and the four half-day Preservation Forums should help improve attendance at these workshops.

Similarly, the consultant will explore options for redirecting a small percentage of existing State budgets from the offices of Utah State Archives, Utah State Library, Utah State History, and Utah Office of Museum Services to support a Preservation Education program that addresses strategic priorities identified through the UC2C Statewide Preservation Survey. Preservation Education programs could be delivered as pre-conference workshops at annual statewide library, archives, and museum conferences and at various locations throughout the state to minimize the cost of attendance for participants. These workshops could include detailed instructions for applying for foundation grants to support preservation initiatives (with completion of an institutional disaster preparedness plan a prerequisite). Additionally, State legislators, key religious leaders, and tribal representatives will receive a flyer outlining the progress achieved in implementing the UC2C priorities, as these benefits affect their constituents. Representatives from the State's library's archives and museums will be asked to send letters and email messages to their political, religious, and tribal representatives seeking their support for initiatives that will address the State's long-term preservation goals.

Project Resources: Budget and Personnel

Members of the UC2C Project Task Force were instrumental in initiating this project and hold senior level positions within the State's key collecting institutions and professional organizations. They have agreed to contribute their time and institutional support to the project. This includes helping to develop a preservation assessment instrument, conduct the survey, disseminate the results through four Preservation Forums, and committing to ongoing statewide outreach and political assistance for the State's collecting institutions. The Project Task Force includes:

Randy Silverman (Preservation Librarian, University of Utah Marriott Library; Principle Investigator for the UC2C project). With 30 years of professional preservation experience, Mr. Silverman has served as a trainer for the American Institute for Conservation's Conservator Emergency Response Team, WESTPAS, and Heritage Preservation's Risk Evaluation and Planning Program pilot program (2008). Mr. Silverman fully supports the significant benefits achievable from preservation planning and with 26 years of service to Utah cultural institutions will ensure the continuity of the UC2C project.

Patricia Smith-Mansfield (Utah State Archivist, Utah State Archives and Records Service) is a member of the State's leadership team for the Council of State Archivists' (CoSA) Intergovernmental Preparedness for Essential Records (IPER) project, funded by a grant from FEMA. Ms. Smith-Mansfield's focus is to develop and deliver critical training to governmental entities to prepare them to protect essential records that are a critical part of continuity of operations (COOP) planning and response.

Donna Jones Morris (Utah State Librarian) is responsible for libraries throughout the State of Utah. Ms. Morris sees preventive conservation as a priority and was instrumental in promoting disaster planning for libraries, archives, and museums in Utah through the 2007-08 WESTPAS initiative.

Colleen Eggett (Training Coordinator, Utah State Library) helped implement the 2007-08 WESTPAS disaster training initiative for collecting institutions. Ms. Eggett remains committed to helping coordinate preservation initiatives for Utah's librarians, archivists, and museum curators.

Dr. Philip F. Notarianni (Director, Utah Division of State History) holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Utah. He is currently Associate Professor/Lecturer in the Ethnic Studies Program, University of Utah and deeply committed to preserving Utah's cultural patrimony.

Dan E. Burke (Director, Utah Office of Museum Services) has worked with Utah museums for the past fifteen years. Mr. Burke has consistently committed financial resources and expanded technical assistance to address the urgent need to preserve Utah's historic and artistic collections.

Dr. Laurel Casjens (Museum Specialist, Utah Office of Museum Services) provides collections management workshops and consultation to Utah's Museums.

Scott Duvall (Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections, Brigham Young University) has actively sought to preserve Special Collections' holdings since joining the library faculty in 1975 and is currently Chair of the Preservation Team at the Harold B. Lee Library. As a member of the Board of the Utah Academic Library Consortium, Mr. Duvall will serve as one of UC2C's liaison to that statewide organization.

Chris Erickson (Digital Preservation Officer, Brigham Young) is the first Digital Preservation Librarian within the State of Utah and has worked for six years in the digital preservation/archiving field. Mr. Erickson will represent UC2C digital preservation issues to the Board of the Utah Academic Library Consortium.

Brent Thompson (Preservation Director, LDS Church History) manages all preservation operations for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints including the Granite Mountain Microfilm Records Vault.

Tom Claeson (Program Director for New Initiatives, PALINET), has 17 years of experience developing and analyzing statewide and regional preservation surveys and other market research pertaining to cultural heritage institutions. Mr. Claeson has served as a member of the Board of Heritage Preservation since 2001.

The UC2C budget will support the following activities: Hiring a consultant to assist the Project Task Force to develop a survey, conduct the assessment, analyze the survey data, prepare a final report and coordinate the review process, and present the report's findings and recommendations at four Preservation Forums. In addition to the consultant's fees, travel monies will be required to transport and sustain the consultant and 10-member Project Task Force to four key geographic locations around the State of Utah to disseminate the survey's results. A brochure will be produced (requiring design and mailing costs) to further disseminate the findings from the UC2C survey, and some telephone and postal expenses will be required for follow-up to encourage a high rate of completion of the UC2C Statewide Preservation Survey and high attendance at the four Preservation Forums. Cost sharing for the UC2C project comes in the form of time committed by the 10-member Project Task Force to execute the above activities and to assist the State's smaller institutions through ongoing outreach and political advocacy.